

# Cultural Alliance Invites Duxbury to 'Pull Up a Chair'

By BONNIE JERNIGAN

Patrick Browne is a busy man these days. As executive director of the Duxbury Rural and Historical Society, he is in the midst of a move from the organization's old headquarters at the Drew House, to spacious new digs near the harbor on Washington Street at the splendid 1807 Nathaniel Winsor House, with better parking and larger rooms for meetings, lecture and events.

Allison Cowen at the Duxbury Art Association has her hands full too. On a recent morning she welcomed a representative from the State Department and a delegation from Oman, interested in making the arts more of a presence in their country, while juggling the phone in the absence of her office manager and soothing first-day jitters for young students

arriving for the beginning of DAA fall classes. (She never stopped smiling.)

South Shore Conservatory Development Director Laura Carleton, and Art Complex Museum Communications Coordinator Laura Doherty have

jobs that are just as hectic. Yet these hard-working professionals, along with their counterparts at the Alden Kindred and the Duxbury Free Library, have made the time to form the Duxbury Cultural Alliance, believing that by pulling together and boosting one another, they can each achieve a greater presence.

## Day-long program of special events

An exhibition featuring the Art Complex Museum's Shaker collection, one of the finest to be found anywhere, has been in the works for several years. With Shaker chairs as their focus, the museum's curators also wanted to exhibit chairs by contemporary furniture makers whose artistry had been influenced by the Shakers, as well as work by artists who used chairs as a motif.

When the Cultural Alliance was beginning to take shape last fall, the lure of the Shakers and the theme of the chair seemed like an ideal focus for a collaboration that might have many facets as well as a wide appeal.

And so it is that on Sunday, September 24, all of us in Duxbury will have the opportunity for a full day of cream-of-the-crop culture, including a

flute and piano concert, an expert lecture on the fascinating Shaker sect and two exhibitions of contemporary art. The Alliance has dubbed the day "Pull Up a Chair," and they've pulled together a lineup that looks like this:

**10 am-4 pm** Chair caning demonstration at the Alden House Museum. *Bring a picnic from noon till 2, when gingersnaps and lemonade will be provided.*

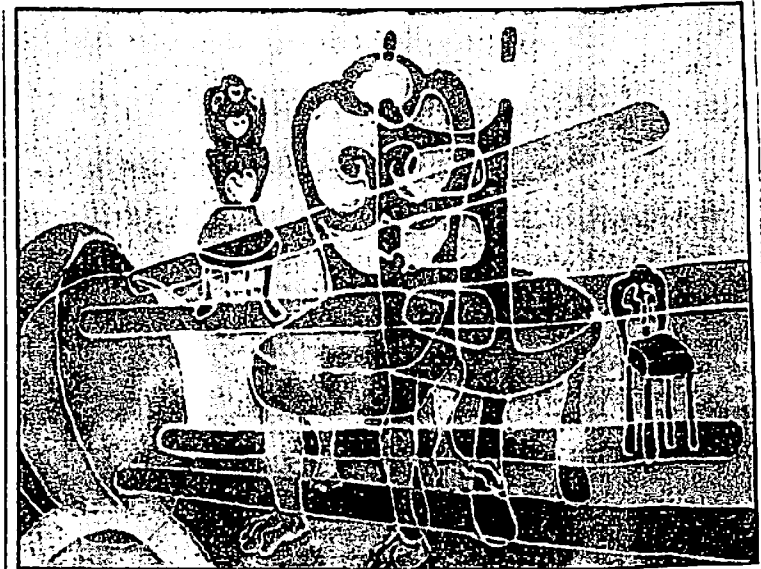
**Noon** "The Shaker Legacy," lecture by Sharon Koomler, Curator of Collections at Hancock Shaker Village, at the King Caesar Barn.

**1:30- 3:30** Opening reception at The Art Complex Museum, including a 1:30 gallery tour with Sharon Koomler.

**2:00-6:00** "Be Seated," a special showing of an exhibition organized by the Duxbury Art Association in the Bengtz and Cutler Galleries at the Ellison Center, featuring 40 works of art that depict chairs in a range of style and media.

**3:00** "Chairman of the Board: A Brief History of Colonial American Chairs," lecture and presentation at the Alden House Museum.

**4:00** "Musical Chairs," a



"Please Be Seated" by Donna Keegan Ouzounian, one of 40 work on exhibit in the DAA show at the Ellison Center

concert of music from around the world, presented by South Shore Conservatory, with flutist Donald Zook ("chair" of the conservatory's woodwind department—how clever!), and pianist Steven Young, at the Ellison Center for the Arts.

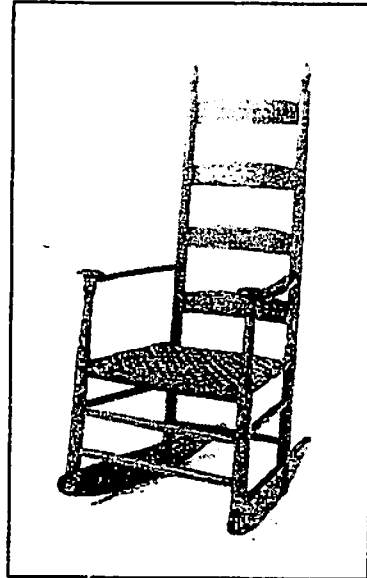
#### **Success Story**

All these events are open to the public free-of-charge, and together, they provide the makings of a splendid afternoon in Duxbury. Each of the participating groups has been publicizing the events to its members and mailing lists. Carleton from the conservatory spoke for all the members of the alliance when she said the afternoon would be a success if constituents of one organization discovered another of Duxbury's cultural gems through the cross promotion and collaborative efforts. Perhaps the kids who take classes at the art association will discover the outdoor sculpture at the Art Complex Museum, or some of the regulars at the Rural and Historical Society lectures will head over to the Ellison Center and hear the conservatory's concert. And if all the activity serves to capture the attention of folks from out of town (There's a nice mention in "Yankee" magazine.), and some of them be-

come convinced that there is plenty to see and do here in Duxbury, then the planners of "Pull up a Chair" will be even more pleased.

#### **Continuing Exhibitions**

The exhibitions at the Art Complex Museum, as well as the one organized by the DAA, will continue for a while, which is a good thing, since they all



#### **Shaker chairs are the stars of the show**

deserve to be seen more than once.

The stars of the show are certainly the Shaker chairs. The common New England slat-back chair, fashioned from the

continued on page three

hands of the Shaker woodworker, has become an icon of American furniture design. Seeing so many of them together provides an opportunity to consider the finer details of design that distinguish each chair and the community where it was made. The chairs produced at Enfield, Connecticut, for example, display a slender, symmetrical finial that ends abruptly in a well-defined neck. Those found on chairs from South Union, Kentucky, resemble an "egg in a cup," while those found on chairs from Enfield, New Hampshire, look like a candle flame.

In the companion show of chairs by contemporary studio furniture makers, some connections to the Shaker influence are more obvious than others. Jon Brooks displays a clear lineage to Shaker furniture in the chairs he constructs, working with still-growing maple saplings and allowing his chairs to grow ladder-like and reach skyward. Steven Whittlesey's "Loveseat," on the other hand, makes a playful reference to the Shaker practice of keeping the sexes separate. A case of shelves divides the piece right down the middle, assuring that not too much loving will happen in this seat.

The shapes that have been springing up on the museum lawn during the past few weeks are a continuation of the ACM's resourceful practice of using its grounds as gallery. In the past, the environmental art exhibitions have been mostly a summer thing. It will be interesting to see the area used during the fall and winter, while 15 "Unique Seats" are on display. Chairs are not the usual fare for many of the artists selected for the exhibition, and their diverse interpretations and visions of the concept of seating have made for a remarkable show. In "Twigloo," Janice Shields has created the impression of a place where pieces of nature have fallen together, offering a haven and a resting place. Barbara Vogelsang, an artist with a reputation for elegant whimsy, calls the seat she created from oversized-leaf shapes "Leaf Me Alone."

#### Greater Visibility for the DAA

Down the street at the Ellison Center, the art association has put together a show that is completely contemporary and entirely two-dimensional. Cowen sent out a "call to artists"

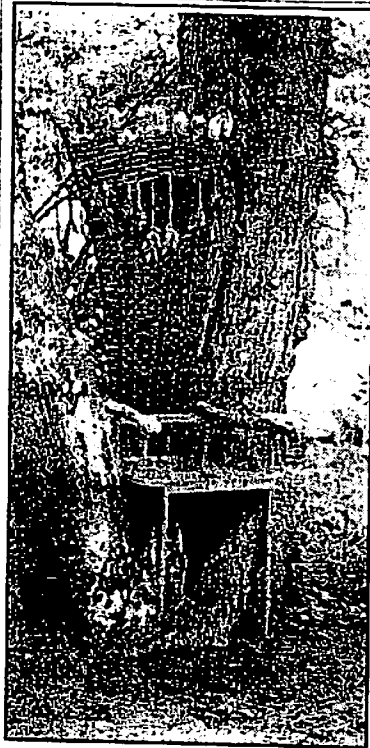


"Leaf Me Alone"

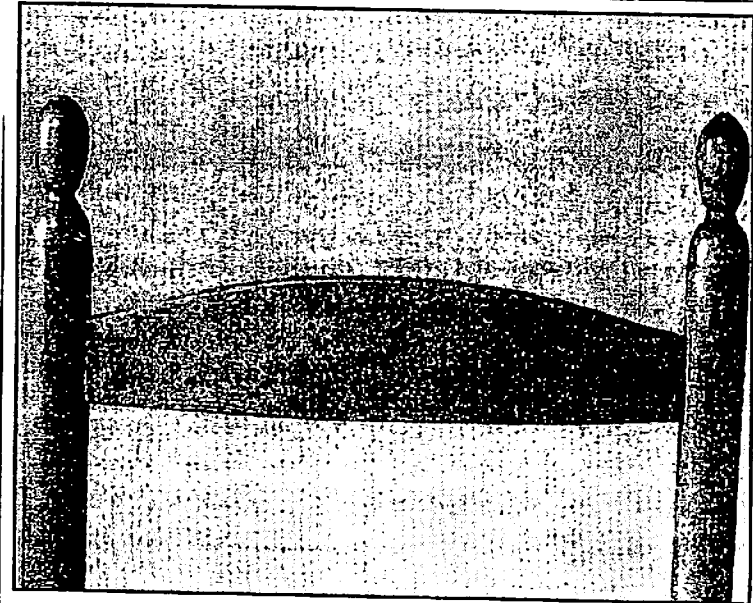
months ago, and received nearly 200 entries. With wall space for only 40 pieces in the combined Bengtz and Cutler Galleries, the art association's selection committee had their work cut out for them. Cowen says they were hoping for a "fun" show, and they had a lot of fun picking the works that would be included in the exhibition.

The wall labels include the names of a number of familiar local artists like Anne Henning. Shirley Muirhead and Brooks Kelley, whose "chair" paintings are a departure from his usual bright colors and stylized beach scenes. There is a watercolor self-portrait of Wendy Hale slouched comfortably in a chair, which the artist painted from a photograph taken by her daughter Rebecca. But the show also quite a few artists who come from some place other than the South Shore. "Jardin du Luxembourg," by Natick photographer Regina Sweeney Gatter, sets the mood for wanderlust with tiny wrens perched on a row of ornate café chairs. By spreading the word of the show so widely, and attracting artists from other places, Cowen has certainly broadened the visibility and raised the status of the Duxbury Art Association.

Unlike widget-making businesses and gadget-selling shops, arts and cultural groups have the delightful advantage of being able to collaborate rather than compete. When you get your widget or buy your gadget, you've probably made your acquisition and you're done for now. But when you have a terrific experience viewing art, hearing a lecture or listening to a concert, you're more likely to want to do more, and to visit other venues, which is why "Pull Up a Chair" is such a winning idea.



"Twigloo" on the ACM Grounds



Distinctive finials on ACM Shaker chairs